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DR. *STILLMAN'S*

FAST SERMON,

APRIL 25, 1799.

DR. SYLVAIN'S

FAST SERMON,

April 25, 1793.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT *BOSTON*,

APRIL 25, 1799;

THE DAY RECOMMENDED BY THE

President of the United States

FOR A

National Fast.

By SAMUEL STILLMAN, *D. D.*

Paſtor of the Firſt Baptiſt Church in *Boſton.*

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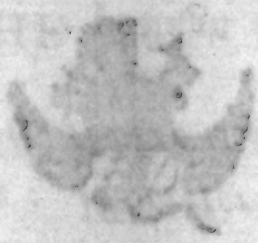

A

SERMON.

JOEL ii. 15—17.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, ſanctify a faſt, call a ſolemn aſſembly:
Gather the people, ſanctify the congregation, aſſemble the elders, gather the children, and thoſe who ſuck the breaſts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her cloſet.
Let the prieſts, the miniſters of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them ſay, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen ſhould rule over them: Wherefore ſhould they ſay among the people, Where is their God?

THE paſſage before us preſents to our view a nation threatened with the judgments of Heaven, and the manner in which it became them to conduct themſelves, in order to avert the impending evils.

THESE judgments were *drought* and *famine*. Jehovah threatened to withhold the neceſſary rains, and thus to reduce "a fruitful land to barrenneſs, for the wickedneſs of thoſe who dwelt therein;" and to complete the calamity, to ſend a variety of devouring inſects, which ſhould march through the land like an army, and ſpread univerſal deſtruction. "That which the palmer-worm hath left, hath the locuſt eaten; and that which the locuſt hath left, hath the canker-worm eaten; and that which the canker-worm hath left, hath the caterpillar eaten. The ſeed is rotten under the clods, the garners are laid deſolate, the barns are broken down, for the corn is withered. How do the beaſts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed, becauſe they have no paſture; the flocks of ſheep are made deſolate."

THE Prophet having thus faithfully repreſented to the people the approaching diſtreſſes of their country, reminds them of their duty, and urges them to the immediate diſcharge of it in the moſt pathetic manner. "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, ſlow to anger and of great kindneſs, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a bleſſing behind him.—Blow the trumpet in Zion, ſanctify a faſt, call a ſolemn aſſembly," &c. &c.

In order to accommodate this ſacred paſſage to ourſelves, it may be proper,

I. To conſider the particular circumſtances of our common country, which render the religious obſervance of this day an important duty.

II. That the miniſters of religion are called to take a diſtinguiſhed part on theſe occaſions.

I. We are to conſider the particular circumſtances of the United States of America, which render the religious obſervance of this day an important duty.

1. The firſt thing I mention, and lament every day of my life, is the unhappy *diſunion* there is among my friends and countrymen, and the rancour and ill will with which it is maintained; whereby friends and families are made unhappy, and the beſt intereſts of our country endangered. "Every kingdom divided againſt itſelf," ſays our Lord, "is brought to deſolation."

With ſuch a Conſtitution of general government as ours, and rulers wholly elective, or in the hands of the people, we might, if ever, have expected a union of the citizens. But ſuch are the intereſts, the paſſions and prejudices of men, that in no ſtate of civil ſociety is there an exemption from this kind of contention. Some of the moſt uſeful and exalted characters, the very men whom God himſelf raiſed up to ſerve

their country, in times the moſt diſtreſſing and dangerous, have been defamed—a WASHINGTON himſelf not excepted.

LAWS paſſed with great deliberation by the majority of the rulers, who had the beſt means of information, and a common intereſt therein with every claſs of citizens, beſides being under the ſolemn obligations of an oath of office, to do the beſt they could for their country, have been oppoſed; which oppoſition has ariſen, in ſome inſtances, to open violence, and brought on anarchy and bloodſhed. Witneſs the inſurrection in Maſſachuſetts a few years ſince, and in the weſtern part of *Pennſylvania.*

IF I can do no more, as a miniſter of peace, I will, in private and in public, bewail this diſtreſſing circumſtance, and cry from my inmoſt ſoul, *Spare thy people, O Lord.*

2. OUR ſituation with reſpect to France is truly alarming. Hoſtilities daily take place between the two nations; yet there is no declaration of war. Matters hang doubtful. What the event will be, we cannot ſay. We have reaſon moſt certainly to deprecate a war, which is the greateſt judgment that can befal a nation. It is not a ſingle evil, but carries in its train the deſtruction of morals, of intereſt, of lives, and happineſs. Its deſolations are awful. We hope, to borrow the words of our worthy Preſident, "that God will preſerve our country from the

deſolating ſword." At the ſame time, we cheerfully commit the management of this important buſineſs to the conſtituted authorities, in whom the power of making peace and war, is veſted by our Conſtitution of government. But of all kinds of war, we ought, moſt of all, to deprecate what is called a civil war; *i. e.* a war of fellow-citizens.

LOOK into the countries in Europe, in which this ſcourge of mankind hath prevailed for years, and what horrid ſcenes of deſolation and carnage preſent themſelves to view. The fineſt countries laid waſte—thouſands of families ruined—and unnumbered multitudes have fallen on the field of battle. "Every battle of the warrior is with confuſed noiſe, and garments rolled in blood."

WE pray God, that ſad neceſſity may not drive us into this awful condition as a nation. But ſhould we, contrary to our wiſhes, be involved in a war with France, we ſhall have this conſolation, that the Executive of the United States has done every thing in his power to prevent it. Repeated attempts have been made to ſettle our diſpute with that nation by negociation, but in vain. Our ambaſſadors were not even admitted to a hearing. And that nothing may be wanting on our part, the Preſident hath made a third appointment of three perſons, who ſtand high in the opinion of their countrymen, to embrace

the firſt favourable opening to accommodate our unhappy diſpute with that nation. Should theſe repeated attempts fail, our Chief Magiſtrate ought to ſtand approved by the whole world; emphatically ſo by every American.

3. It becomes us on this day, with the greateſt ſerioufneſs, to take a view of the *moral condition of our country.* One melancholy circumſtance attending this inquiry, is, that we are not properly affected with it. Rather there is an evident diſpoſition among the people to forget it; or when mentioned, to *leſſen* the moral evils that abound among us; or to turn off the charge from our own nation to the nations of *Europe.* Indeed, my hearers, it is, to a ſober mind, an affecting conſideration, that infidelity of the moſt abſolute and awful kind, is there encouraged. There have been ſome perſons, in different ages, who have gone ſo far as to deny the very being of a God. But never, till very lately, did we hear or read of the rulers of a whole nation eſpouſing the cauſe of Atheiſm. This ſentiment, as far as it is believed, deſtroys the foundations of moral obligation, and of all civilized life; and has already ſpread its horrid and deſtructive influence among thouſands of unhappy people; and opened the way, in its progreſs, for thoſe uncommon crimes which have marked the revolution of that nation.

We ſee other nations overwhelmed in ignorance and ſuperſtition; and even among thoſe who once were diſtinguiſhed for their attachment to Chriſtianity, there is a lamentable increaſe of Deiſm.

But it becomes us to attend more particularly to the moral condition of our own country.

The principles of Deiſm have been gradually increaſing among us for ſome years paſt, which have become apparent, among other things, in a kind of *political religion*, adjuſted merely to the ſtate of civil ſociety; which at beſt will be found to be no more than natural religion, ſanctified by the name of *Chriſtianity*; but which a Deiſt has no objection to, becauſe it is clear to him, that the State muſt have ſome kind of religion, in order to preſerve the peace of ſociety, and the obligation of an oath.

From this ſyſtem the diſtinguiſhing doctrines of the goſpel are excluded. You are to ſay nothing about total depravity of man—regeneration—neceſſity of divine influence to change his heart—Deity of Chriſt—atonement by his blood, &c.—but to inculcate merely the neceſſity of a good life, without any regard to a man's opinions. This is conſiſtent with Deiſm.

Some perſons have diſcovered their friendſhip for infidelity, by the books they keep in their houſes, and which they read with a reliſh; while the ſacred Scriptures are wholly neglected.

THE ſame principles and diſpoſition lead them to neglect public worſhip; to which they pay no more attention than is ſufficient to ſave appearances. To the ſame cauſe we may aſcribe the almoſt univerſal neglect of family government and religion. From this, as one ſource, has ariſen the general profaneneſs of the riſing generation. The children and youth, when unobſerved, as they think, make uſe of ſuch language as I dare not repeat; by which God is affronted, and the pious ear diſtreſſed. The Lord's days are profaned by rambling into the country, when the ſeaſon will admit it. And even at the doors of our churches, or round them, you will often ſee perſons trifling away that time that ought to be employed in devotion; who, by their noiſe without, interrupt thoſe who wiſh to worſhip God within.

HENCE alſo ariſes the general ſpirit of luxury and diſſipation that prevail among us. For all principles that tend to remove from the mind a ſenſe of a future reckoning, or judgment to come, or to leſſen the evil of ſin, open a door for the gratification of the vicious paſſions.

WE may depend upon it, that the principles of infidelity increaſe the general thirſt for pleaſure, and public and expenſive amuſements; and on the other hand, that thoſe amuſements increaſe the people's ſpirit for diſſipation, and

make them more unfriendly to Chriſtianity, becauſe it is ſo holy in its principles, and ſo ſtrict in its morals.

"PEOPLE of faſhion and quality (ſays one) have great advantage above the common people. Their condition and education give them a livelineſs and brightneſs of parts, from whence one might juſtly expect a more exalted virtue. How comes it then, that we ſee as ill morals, as little religious wiſdom, and as great diſorders among them, as among the moſt rude, uneducated part of the world? It is becauſe the politeneſs of their lives, their courſe of diverſions and amuſements, and their way of ſpending their time, as much extinguiſh the wiſdom and light of religion, as the groſſneſs and ignorance of the dulleſt part of the world. Any way of life that darkens our minds, that miſemploys our underſtandings, that fills us with a trifling ſpirit, that diſorders our paſſions, that ſeparates us from the Spirit of God, is the ſame certain road to deſtruction, whether it ariſes from ſtupid ſenſuality, rude ignorance, or polite pleaſures. Had any one, therefore, the power of an apoſtle, and the tongue of an angel, it would be well employed in expoſing and diſſuading from thoſe ways of life, which wealth, corruption, and politeneſs have brought among us. We, indeed, call them diverſions; but they do the whole work of idol-

atry and infidelity, and fill people with ſo much blindneſs and hardneſs of heart, that they neither live by wiſdom, nor feel the want of it; but are content to *play* away their lives, with ſcarce any attention to the approaching ſcenes of death, judgment, and eternity."*

SUCH, my brethren, is our moral condition. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold. Let us then beſeech the Father of mercies, to ſpare us as a nation, and to revive his own work among us, that there may be a univerſal reformation in our country.

4. I WISH to call your attention to another very alarming circumſtance of the United States, I mean the *ſore judgment*, with which we have been repeatedly viſited. The peſtilence hath lately ſpread fear and death around us. Nor has it been confined, but hath viſited ſeveral of the principal cities of the Union. Concerning this dreadful calamity, you will permit me to make the following obſervations:

1ſt. IT is a *new* diſpenſation of Providence. That our country has, at different periods, and in different places, been in years paſt viſited with this fever in a degree, is allowed; but never, till within a few years, has it become ſo general, fatal and alarming. "Is there not a cauſe?"

* Mr. LAW.

"Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

2dly. YOU will remember alſo, that it hath been *repeated* in the ſame places; ſo that we know not when we are ſafe. We are in danger of another attack. We have no more reaſon to expect an exemption from it this ſeaſon, than the laſt. It is, however, our duty to try to diſcover its natural cauſes, and by every method in our power to prevent its return.* Yet, if we conſider the abounding of vice among us, we moſt certainly have every thing to fear.

3dly. I remark, the *ſea-ports* have been marked out as the ſpecial objects of this calamity. In them the people enjoy great advantages of obtaining information and wealth. To them much is given; of them much will be required. The inhabitants of the cities take the lead: From them, our friends in the country, in common, copy their vices and their manners. THEY are the firſt in guilt, and the firſt in puniſhment.

4thly. We may alſo obſerve, on this occaſion, the many diſtreſſing effects of this calamity.

* I am happy to ſay, that our Board of Health are indefatigable in their endeavours, to anſwer the end of their appointment.

FEARFUL apprehenſions, which deſtroy all peace of mind and domeſtic enjoyment, prevail. Theſe fears drive many perſons from their homes, to ſeek ſecurity in the adjacent country. The conſequence of which is, buſineſs is neglected, and expenſes incurred, which will embarraſs many families for years to come. The pleaſures of ſociety are ſuſpended; and ſome families have been totally cut off. The mourners at this day are going about the ſtreets. To which I add, *the interruption of our commerce.* Boſton ſuffered much, but New-York and Philadelphia much more. May we not, my brethen, in theſe awful events of Providence, read our crime in the puniſhment? We grew rich too faſt for our virtue, by commerce; that wealth we too generally employed in promoting luxury and diſſipation; and Heaven hath given it a check by this melancholy and fatal fever. It becomes us to learn righteouſneſs, while the judgments of the Lord are abroad in our land.

II. I PASS to the ſecond thing in the method, which is, That the miniſters of religion are called to take a diſtinguiſhed part on theſe occaſions.

THIS obſervation is founded on the paſſage before us. To ſum up the matter, they were, by their office under the former diſpenſation,

to lead in the public ſervices of religion. Thus it is under the diſpenſation of the goſpel alſo, by the choice or appointment of their religious brethren. Their duty is plainly taught us in the text—"Blow the trumpet in Zion, ſanctify a faſt, call a ſolemn aſſembly:—Let the prieſts, the miniſters of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; and let them ſay, Spare thy people, O Lord," &c. Here we have the two important duties for ſuch a day as this—*Repentance* and *Prayer*. The firſt is, *repentance*. Let them weep not alone, but with the whole congregation, who ought to have but one voice on ſo ſolemn an occaſion as this. God grant that ſuch may be the diſpoſition of this aſſembly to day, and of all the people throughout the United States.

FROM the ſhort account that has been given of the alarming circumſtances of our country, it appears that we ought to weep between the porch and the altar, over thoſe ſins which are our reproach, and under thoſe judgments which we have already felt, and again anticipate.

AND to repentance let us add, as a religious aſſembly, the ſolemn and importunate prayer of the text, *Spare thy people, O Lord*. In the pertinent and comprehenſive language of our worthy Preſident, let us with one heart pray—

"That God would interpoſe to arreſt the progreſs of that impiety and licentiouſneſs, in principle and practice, ſo offenſive to himſelf, and ſo ruinous to mankind: That he would make us deeply ſenſible, that righteouſneſs exalteth a nation, but that ſin is a reproach of any people: That he would turn us from our tranſgreſſions, and turn his diſpleaſure from us: That he would withhold us from unreaſonable diſcontent,—from diſunion, faction, ſedition, and inſurrection: That he would preſerve our country from the deſolating ſword: That he would ſave our cities and towns from a repetition of thoſe awful peſtilential viſitations, under which they have ſuffered ſo ſeverely, and that the health of our inhabitants generally may be precious in his ſight: That he would favour us with fruitful ſeaſons, and ſo bleſs the labours of the huſbandman, as that there may be food in abundance for man and beaſt: That he would proſper our commerce, manufactures, and fiſheries, and give ſucceſs to the people in all their lawful induſtry and enterprize: That he would ſmile on our colleges, academies, ſchools, and ſeminaries of learning, and make them nurſeries of ſound ſcience, morals, and religion: That he would bleſs all magiſtrates, from the higheſt to the loweſt, give them the true ſpirit of their ſtation, make them a terror to evil doers, and a

praiſe to them who do well: That he would preſide over the councils of the nation at this critical period, enlighten them to a juſt diſcernment of the public intereſts, and ſave them from miſtake, diviſion, and diſcord: That he would ſucceed our preparations for defence, and bleſs our armaments, by land and ſea; That he would put an end to the effuſion of human blood, and the accumulation of human miſery, among the contending nations of the earth, by diſpoſing them to juſtice, to equity, to benevolence, and to peace: And that he would extend the bleſſings of knowledge, of true liberty, and of pure and undefiled religion, throughout the world."

I ADD, once more, That it is the duty of the miniſters of religion, to "blow the trumpet in Zion, and to ſound an alarm," when their country is in danger from domeſtic or foreign enemies. The reaſon of this part of their duty is plainly this—They are *citizens*, members of *civil* ſociety; have civil rights as well as other men. They have intereſt, families, liberties, as dear to them as to any other citizens. Shall they ſee all theſe in danger, and be ſilent? Becauſe they are Chriſtians and miniſters of religion, ſhall they ſee ruin coming on themſelves, their families, and their country, and ſay nothing? This cannot be their duty. But why ſhould *they* be

ſilent, more than their Chriſtian brethren? Whether they move in public or in private life, they believe the ſame truths, and profeſs to be governed by the ſame laws, as Chriſtians. They have like intereſts, and like duties.

THE Prophet Ezekiel repreſents them as *watchmen*, and declares, that if they "ſee the ſword coming, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned, if the ſword come and take any perſon from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require, ſaith the Lord, at the watchman's hands."

HATH not Jeſus Chriſt, as our great Lord and Maſter, taught us to "give to Ceſar the things that are Ceſar's—honour to whom honour." To whom ought we to give honour, if not to the men whom the majority of the American people have delighted to honour?—rulers choſen from among ourſelves, and whom we can diſplace conſtitutionally, if guilty of mal-conduct.

THE Conſtitution of our general government, and the men who adminiſter it, are of our own choice; who frequently return to the claſs of private citizens, to feel the injury themſelves, of any oppreſſive laws they may have enacted during their adminiſtration. What greater check can there be to the abuſe of power than this? How ought this circumſtance,

with many others of a like nature, which I have not time to mention, to silence those mistaken citizens, who are continually endeavouring to clog the wheels of the general government, by censuring men and measures.

SHALL the ministers of religion be censured for endeavouring, like Paul, to support government?—the government of their own choice? Is it not their duty to use their influence to promote the peace, the order, and safety of society? Most certainly it is.

DURING the American revolution, they were generally commended for their exertions in behalf of their oppressed country, and by some of the very men who now condemn them. Yet they are acting the same part. Now, as then, they espouse the cause of their own country, and wish its peace and prosperity, as well as happiness to the whole family of man.

BUT the objection does not lie so much against their "*preaching* politics," as against the "*politics* they preach." Should they take the opposite side of the question, those who now censure would applaud their conduct. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof.

BUT though I vindicate the right, I hope I shall never abuse it, either in public or in private. Nor do I ever wish to introduce any

thing of this kind into the pulpit, unleſs when the alarming condition of my country renders it my duty, which I believe to be emphatically ſo at this day. It is the deſire of my heart, to poſſeſs a ſpirit of real devotion myſelf, and to encourage it in my friends. And if you, my brethren, have the ſame alarming views of our preſent ſituation that I have, and the ſame anticipations, you will feel ſerious, and be diſpoſed ardently to pray, *Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage, our common country, to reproach.*

I HAVE only to add—The cuſtom of God's ancient people in a day of calamity, and the critical ſituation of our country at this time, render this day of national humiliation and prayer, highly proper and important. The Lord reigns. The events of empire are under his control. To Him let us approach with the deepeſt repentance, and moſt fervent prayer, that he will preſerve us as a nation from the evils with which we are threatened, and which we juſtly deſerve for our ſins againſt him.

PERMIT me, in an eſpecial manner, to remind you of the very important and trying ſituation of our beloved Preſident. How great and numerous are his cares of office! How many anxious nights and days does he paſs on account of his country! to which he has always manifeſted a moſt uniform and ſincere attachment:

To promote the intereſt of which, he has devot
a great part of his life at home and abroad, a
has rendered her the moſt eſſential ſervice
Brethren, pray for him, that God will graciouſ
ſuſtain him, and inſpire him with that wiſdo
that is profitable to direct : alſo, that the coun
cils of our nation may be under the divine di
rection ; and that the happy period may ſoo
arrive, when that kingdom which is righteouſ
neſs, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoſt, ſhall b
univerſally eſtabliſhed, and all men dwell to
gether in friendſhip and in love. And let a
the people ſay,

AMEN.